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INEL helps in Three Mile Island effort

The March 28 Three Mile Island nuclear power plant incident affected not only people in Pennsylvania and drew attention from the entire world, but it also sent INEL personnel scrambling to mobilize their expertise in helping to find solutions to the problem.

Space does not permit naming all the individuals involved. It was an INEL effort. The following are some of the events that brought INEL people into play:

Nick Kaufman, EG&G Idaho LOFT director, and Larry Ybarrondo, EG&G Idaho Water Reactor Research director, went to Pennsylvania to join a team of experts in attempting to bring the reactor to a safe shutdown condition as quickly as possible. Several days later, Willis Bixby of the DOE-ID staff joined them to assist in establishing communications with the several national laboratories which had been asked for assistance.

Crews at Semiscale, Loft Test Support Facility and Code Develpment worked a long, tense weekend setting up models simulating the accident, testing, analyzing data and evaluating concerns and options. The EG&G Idaho Physics Division aided in analysis. Jack Liebenthal, EG&G Idaho Thermal Analysis, Ron Ayres, EG&G Idaho Test Reactors Technical Support, and Rich Green, EG&G Idaho Safety Standards, worked with a firm in Salt Lake City to study the problem of removing hydrogen from water.

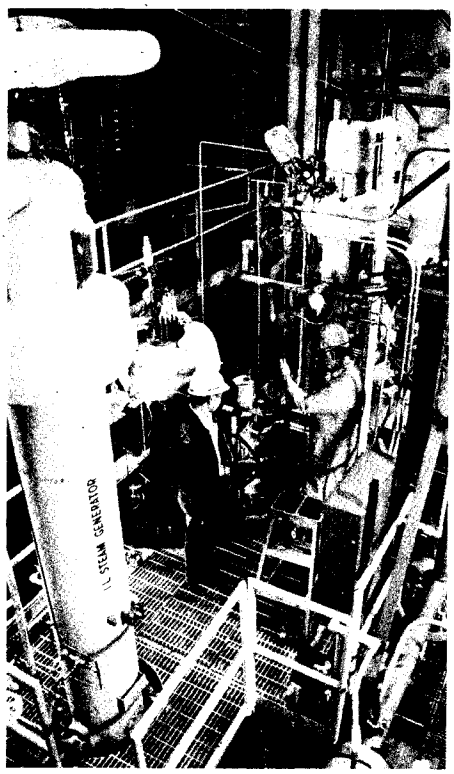
Word reached Wes Headington at the Semiscale Facilities and Test Operations Friday afternoon, March 30, to keep a crew on the job. They worked through that night modifying the Semiscale loop to simulate the type of plant at Three Mile Island.

Early Saturday morning, the crew conducted the first experiment to remove a gas bubble from the system without uncovering the heater core. On Sunday, following an early-morning briefing, the crew worked all day and night to prepare for another experiment. Early Monday, they completed the second test and reported the results to DOE.

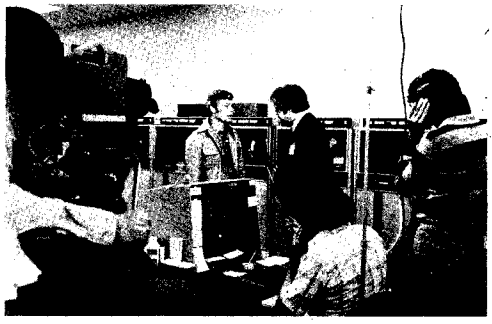
"The first night was the roughest," Semiscale pressurizer operator Creig Nelson said. "After working regular day shift Friday, we got pretty tired during that night. But it was exciting and we all felt the urgency of the situation."

"Some of us cooked our own breakfast at the TAN cafeteria and they brought in sandwiches for us." said core power operator Tom O'Connell.

While no one likes to spend a weekend wrestling with problems of such urgency, INEL personnel responded to the emergency quickly and with the dedication that has been their trademark for the past 30 years.



KAY NII (left), EG&G Idaho mechanical engineer, and Dean Chase, maintenance fitter, are installing measurement devices in Semiscale for pressurizer tests. The tests will attempt to duplicate the Three Mile Island accident so engineers can obtain information that might help explain what happened.



NATIONAL ATTENTION focused on the INEL during the Three Mile Island accident. NBC correspondent Don Oliver interviews Bob Tiller, DOE-ID Reactor Operations and Programs Division director, who explains the INEL's role in assisting with the solutions to the complex problems engineers faced in bringing the Pennsylvania reactor to a safe shutdown condition as quickly as possible.

CREIG NELSON (foreground) watches pressure instruments at Semiscale in a simulated test of the Three Mile Island accident. Tom O'Connell (beard) operates the core power while Tony Eaton (right) adjusts the primary coolant pumps. The three EG&G Idaho employees were among several who devoted a long weekend to providing data on the Pennsylvania problem.